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**Found, Fucked Up, Fixed**

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**Found, Fucked Up, Fixed**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Found, Fucked Up, Fixed**

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*Found, Fucked Up, Fixed* is an overview of my sculptural work engaging with the arbitrary distinctions created between opposing sites and how those distinctions are used to alienate subjects in pursuit of maintaining order and in turn, a sense of stability. Boundaries are porous and permeable membranes through which shared meaning slips; they are a third space that is neither a site of complete inclusion nor total exclusion. Considering the boundary traversing the ideal and the failure of the ideal reveals seemingly distinct oppositions that are not at all distinct, but the same. The following report examines my artistic production within the context of other artists, critics, philosophers, and literary theorists who have observed the ambiguity inherent in boundary regions. Also considered here are the conceptual foundations for the use of abstracted and exaggerated anatomical fragments as a strategy for questioning boundaries, the application of entropic processes, the degradation of form and content, and the use of “filthy” materials.

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*Man willingly imagines himself to be like the god Neptune, stilling his own waves, with majesty; nevertheless, the bellowing waves of the viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval, brusquely put an end to his dignity.*

– Georges Bataille

## **BETWEEN THE GUTTER AND THE STARS**

The French philosopher, Jean Hyppolite, spoke of the “first myth of outside and inside”. In this myth Hyppolite suggests that it is in these two terms’ opposition, *inside* and *outside*, that alienation finds its foundation and basis for hostility.<sup>1</sup> I am producing work that engages with the arbitrary distinctions created between opposing sites and how those distinctions are used to alienate subjects in pursuit of maintaining order and in turn, a sense of stability. Evidence of this process of alienation or othering can be clearly examined within regions bordering sites of opposition. Boundaries expose an ambiguity that is born when defining a binary and this ambiguity is a third space that challenges order and stability. Subjects occupying this space are refused a position at either end of a defined polarity and are relegated to ambiguity and exclusion from the acceptable.

What underpins the need to create strongly defined dichotomies resulting in the imposition of boundaries? Some have argued that humans strive to create an ideal world for themselves and in doing so repress their actual nature. Yve-Alain Bois, echoing George Bataille writes, “man is proud of being erect (and having thus emerged from the animal state, the biological mouth-anus axis of which is horizontal), but this pride is founded on a repression”.<sup>2</sup> In an idealized world, humans are greater than where they came from, and where they came from was an animal state where the mouth and anus were at the same level as the ground. In a maneuver to make oneself distinct, to differentiate ourselves from beasts, humanity represses all things connected with the mouth being on the level of both the anus and the ground. The ideal requires the glorification of how humanity views itself now (erect) and represses its bestial origins. Associations with the ground and the lower

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Hyppolite, “Spoken Commentary on the Verneinung (negation) of Freud,” *La Psychanalyse*, no. 1 (1956), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A Users Guide* (Zone, 1997), 26.

body are to be derided and humanity defines itself in opposition to such things. Bataille illustrates this repression employing the metaphor of one's big toe, writing, "the human race distances itself *as much as it can* from terrestrial mud", but ultimately humanity's big toe is inescapably mired in earthly putrescence.<sup>3</sup> Or borrowing from how Oscar Wilde's Lord Darlington may understand this condition, "we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Georges Bataille, and Allan Stoekl, *Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan, A Play About a Good Woman*, Act III.



## THE FAILURE OF AN IDEAL

Literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, refers to objects associated with the lower body as the material bodily lower stratum. In making a distinction between an upper stratum, the region above the genitals, and a lower stratum below the genitals: a hierarchical order is created, albeit a false one. Bakhtin's ideas regarding the material bodily lower stratum nicely complement Bataille's concept of *base materialism* – matter that is the lowest of the low. Bataille wished to combat the myth of human erectness by lowering and liberating matter, “from all ontological prisons....de-classing matter, of extracting it from the philosophical clutches of classical materialism, which is nothing but idealism in disguise”.<sup>5</sup> In this view, humanity creates an ideal world for itself through repression. A repression that comes at the expense of creating stark dichotomies privileging some subjects and alienating others.

The artist, Mike Kelley, also spoke of the problem of the ideal as one of striving to reach a false perfection. A skewed perception of perfection generated by mass manufacturing that leads people to view non-manufactured craft objects as failures. “I think [people] see the manufactured object, by virtue of its "untouched" quality, as a perfect object...I'm interested in objects that try to play up that schism-between the idealized notion behind the object and the failure of the object to attain that”.<sup>6</sup> The repression that is the ideal, defined in opposition to the failed ideal exists in many other antipodal pairs including: human/animal, familiar/foreign, inclusion/exclusion, interior/exterior, clean/filthy, high/low, above/below, vertical/horizontal, refuse/art, form/formless. Dichotomies such as these result in the othering of subjects, sublimated as a, “danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Kelley, and Julie Sylvester, *Parkett: Talking Failure*, Vol. 31 (Zürich: Parkett Verlag, 1992), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 71.

Considering the boundary traversing the ideal and the failure of the ideal reveals seemingly distinct oppositions that are not at all distinct, but the same. Mouths and anuses are a continuum, the extremities of the same organ system. Indeed, this sameness is also found in the Latin root *homo sacer*, the source from which the English word *sacred* originates.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the Christianization of Rome, the term's meaning was, “set apart or cursed” before engendering its later meaning of “holy” after pagan beliefs fell out of favor. Similarly, the word miserable, “started off as a term of pity (“the wretched”) but then...became a curse (“wretches!”).<sup>9</sup> The holy and the cursed, the pitiful and the despised are but a few of the binaries where subjective boundaries are manifested for the purpose of othering. Boundaries are created to make a distinction, to create an Other that is not there but disguises a double use for that which is the same.



**Figure 1.** *Superior Pharyngeal Response*  
polyurethane foam, steel, acrylic, sisal, silicone, faux leather jacket  
37" x 29" x 34"

<sup>8</sup> “Homo Sacer”, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo\\_sacer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_sacer), (Accessed October 27, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'abjection*, OC, vol. 2, and *The College of Sociology: 1937-1939*, ed. Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 218.

## OF BODIES AND BOUNDARIES

I am producing work that considers the nature of uncertainty or the ambiguity of occupying a third space that is neither a site of complete inclusion nor total exclusion. Boundaries, such as those between interiors and exteriors, the high and the low, are not clearly definable. Boundaries are porous and permeable membranes through which shared meaning slips. Closely examining boundary regions drop the veil on certainty. Ambiguity plays a destabilizing role in order and I work to cultivate this type of uncertainty in process, material choice, form, and content.

Where do interiors cease being interiors and become exteriors? Where does the body end and the world begin? I pose these questions while utilizing the body as a site for cultivating uncertainty. These works have their beginnings referencing the body. Perhaps the so-called boundaries of the body most clearly illustrate the confused double nature of these dichotomies. Critic, Hal Foster, suggests that the body is the primary site for examining, “the fragility of our boundaries, of the spatial distinction between our insides and outsides”, and that these arbitrary boundaries are a site of ambiguity, “where meaning collapses”.<sup>10</sup> It is within this zone of ambiguity and meaning, where interiors and exteriors are confused, that I exaggerate, fragment and abstract sculptural forms.

The forms in my work parallel human anatomy and anatomical systems like the nervous, vascular and lymphatic. They expose their interiors to the world, exhibiting wounds that are physical, psychological, and environmental. Insides expel outwards, evacuating their contents through surfaces pocked with punctures and incisions. Hastily sutured voids, excavated by burns and abrasions bare evidence of an eruptive discharge. Bright mottled colors and blistered broken textures intermingle with contrasting matte and gloss surfaces to evince a repulsion which nonetheless does not inhibit the desire to touch. Incorporating contorted, fragmented, and exaggerated anthropomorphic beings, colliding the animate and inanimate, the organic and synthetic, the forms traverse the boundary that fluctuates between, within and without.

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<sup>10</sup> Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” *October* 78, (1996), 114.



**Figure 2.** *minajuree uv hungurs #1*  
extruded polystyrene, polyurethane foam, steel, cardboard, burlap, epoxy, acrylic, ash, sawdust  
37" x 29" x 34"

While my work initially draws form from referencing the body, through operations of degradation and regeneration, it quickly takes on a quality of non-form. The critic, Rosalind Krauss, proposes that non-form or formlessness is, "not just an erasure of form but an operation to undo form, and thus a process of generating "bad form"". <sup>11</sup> The shape this work takes is an interplay between a set of initial conditions and operations performed to undo such conditions. Material failure, corrosion, abrasion, viscosity and gravity are but a few operations which assist in achieving these ends.

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<sup>11</sup> Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 108.



**Figure 3.** *any cornered living being #2*  
polyurethane foam, steel, curtains, yarn, plastic cups and sheeting  
39" x 64" x 58"

## FOUND FILTH

In the critical dictionary section of Bataille's *Documents I*, the author wrote of the formless, or *informe*, a concept which he refused to define, but understood as, “a term that is used to bring things down [*déclasser*] in the world”.<sup>12</sup> Using the degraded, deteriorated, or otherwise unwanted materials of society, I drag things down to a base level by implementing *informe* operations. Such procedures were seen by Bataille as a tool in the battle, “against idealism...to vanquish the fetishizing (or ontologizing) of matter”.<sup>13</sup> Through material choice and processes, I consider the destabilization of established order and false idealism.

Degradation is a fundamental factor in choosing what matter should be applied. Sigmund Freud succinctly points out in *Character and Anal Erotism*, “Dirt is matter in the wrong place”, indirectly alluding to the artificial hierarchy created between the ideal and the failed ideal where distinctions are made between filth and cleanliness.<sup>14</sup> It is an othering that is produced when dividing lines are, “built up between society...on the basis of the simple logic of excluding filth”.<sup>15</sup> I scavenge dumpsters for cast-off consumer waste, undesirable spent materials which have seemingly lost their luster or are perceived as useless. They include such waste materials as food containers, cardboard, construction Tyvek, sofa upholstery, used curtains, ash, sawdust, coffee grounds, charcoal, and rocks among others. It is in using these materials that my work embodies, “degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal...a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Georges Bataille, “Informe,” in *Documents I (critical dictionary)* (1929), 382.

<sup>13</sup> Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Character and Anal Erotism (1908).” *PsycEXTRA Dataset* (1971), 172-173.

<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Michail Michajlovič Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19.





**Figure 4.** *damnatio memoriae*  
consumer packaging, steel, wire  
dimensions variable



**Figure 5.** *damnatio memoriae* - detail

## FUCKED UP

Form is also degraded through process. When direct heat is applied, materials deteriorate by melting, blistering, contracting, and burning. Tyvek is a construction material used as a moisture barrier that is often wrapped around housing structures prior to the installation of aluminum or wood siding. Landscape fabric is a material consisting of omni-directional fibers used for controlling weed growth. When heat is applied to either of these materials they react unpredictably, pulling themselves apart. In the process of pulling themselves apart, fissures open, and blisters grow and multiply until they burn or burst.

In his essay *Anti Form*, the artist, Robert Morris, discusses the move from, “the making of things to the making of material itself...a direct manipulation of a given material without the use of any tool”.<sup>17</sup> The manner of material manipulation Morris writes of here is characteristic of operations I employ in undoing form. Extruded polystyrene (XPS) is a construction material often used in my work and industrial solvents such as acetone weaken the structural integrity of XPS. When dripped or poured in varying volumes, acetone dissolves XPS causing it to melt unpredictably, creating voids and fissures in the material.

The use of substances that lack the material qualities for which they are intended is another operation that undoes form. Woven burlap fabric, deconstructed to its base fibers, is used to suture fissures and attach materials together. However, these sinewy burlap fibers lack the material strength to withstand the suturing process. The operation of mending and joining is continually being denied by the fraying and failure of the burlap fibers. The material that holds the work together simultaneously falls apart as a consequence of its construction.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (MIT Press, 1993), 258.





**Figure 6.** *minajuree uv hungurs #3*  
tyvek, acrylic, polyurethane, kyanite, manila hemp  
43" x 35" x 10"

## ENVELOPED

Quite a few mythic narratives exist linking color to the filth of degrading living bodies. It has been said, perhaps apocryphally, that color pigments have been produced from, “acids extracted from the body and eggs of female cochineal insects”, as well as from, “secretions drained from the glands of predatory sea snails”, and even, “the piss of cows fed on mango leaves”.<sup>18</sup>

Artist, Amy Sillman, believes color adds an anthropomorphic character to art. To Sillman, working with color is, “anthropomorphic, relational, emotional, psychological, and corporeal”<sup>19</sup>. Mythic narratives aside, it should come as no revelation that color has an anthropomorphic component. The Greek word, “*khroma* (colour), is derived from the word *khros* (skin, the body’s surface).” A similar congruence is found in the German term for color (*farbe*), “which comes from *\*farwa*, the common Germanic word that meant ‘form’, ‘skin’, ‘envelope’”.<sup>20</sup>

Envelopes are exteriors that hold or envelop interiors, like ground flesh in sausage casing or organs enclosed by skin. I utilize contrasting colors and sheen to amplify the ambiguity of the boundaries between interiors and exteriors. Gloss colors often imply the moistness of an interior while a matte sheen can infer exterior. Overlaying matte colors on gloss surfaces can be interpreted as both an interior being polluted from the outside or an exterior being infected from the inside. Similarly, when synthetic colors are expelled and burst through surfaces possessing natural material color, the surface inherits an epidermal quality – a quality of anatomical containment which confers a sense of being to objects.

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Sillman, "On Color," [http://www.amysillman.com/uploads\\_amy/pdfs/f9bb05bf.pdf](http://www.amysillman.com/uploads_amy/pdfs/f9bb05bf.pdf), (Accessed January 16, 2019), 107.

<sup>19</sup> Sillman, *On Color*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *The Colour of Our Memories* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 168.



**Figure 7.** *McFeely (reclining)*  
polyurethane, polyurethane foam, nylon, steel, ash, coffee grounds, egg shells, burlap, duct tape, landscape fabric, padded envelopes  
62" x 15" x 21"



**Figure 8.** *McFeely (reclining) - detail*

## FIXED

Entropic processes, those of the type which presuppose, “an initial order and a deterioration of that order”, are also prevalent in the production of my work.<sup>21</sup> The interplay of chance factors including time, corrosion, abrasion, gravity, viscosity, absorption, and material stability calls into question artistic agency in making my work and the unpredictability of results. I possess agency in creating the initial order, but *informe* operations from form to un-form are determined by the materials themselves.

Pouring tinted epoxy resin or liquid polyurethane onto and through forms, it flows freely, settling, and dripping, only gravity, friction, and viscosity controlling its resulting placement. Similarly, when ash, charcoal, coffee grinds, and/or sand are thrown onto forms, gravity has its say about whether it adheres or falls to the ground. Two-part expanding polyurethane foam is a material frequently used to fill or join materials. The expansion rate of this material varies widely, especially when filling cavities of unknown or imprecise volumes. The uncertainty of the expansion and the build up of back pressure results in the splitting open of seams, bursting through the containing material where it is weakest. The amalgamation and overlay of colors resulting from dripping, pooling, and bursting events also exhibit an entropic element which appears to mimic aspects of Sillman's understanding of color. Sillman advises ignoring color theory and welcoming, “the collision of mistakes, accidents, desires, contradictions, destruction, and possible disasters that color embodies”.<sup>22</sup>

The objects produced from these entropic processes have a formlessness that is not permanent and can change from presentation to presentation. Substances like polyurethane rubber, Tyvek, and flexible foams imbue these objects with a pliability that keeps their arrangements in a state of perpetual flux. As Robert Morris has emphasized, considering gravity and matter in such ways, “results in forms that were not projected in advance...give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied, as replacing

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<sup>21</sup> Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Sillman, *On Color*, 116.

will result in another configuration”.<sup>23</sup> In leaving these objects open to continual mutation, stability is negated and uncertainty embraced.

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<sup>23</sup> Morris, *Continuous Project*, 258.

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